A SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE

PARISH CHURCH

OF

ST. STEPHEN, WALLBROOK.

FOR THE

BENEFIT OF THE CHILDREN

BELONGING TO THE

ST. ETHELBERGA SOCIETY:

On SUNDAY APRIL, 14, 1771.

By THOMAS COOMBE, M. A.

CHAPLAIN to the moſt noble the MARQUIS of ROCKINGHAM.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

The Rich and Poor meet together, the Lord is the Maker of them all.

SOLOMON.

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BRITISH MUSEUM

TO THE

RIGHT REVEREND

RICHARD, LORD BISHOP OF LONDON:

THIS DISCOURSE

AS AN HUMBLE TRIBUTE TO HIS VIRTUES,

SO UNIVERSALLY AND GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGED

THROUGHOUT HIS AMERICAN DIOCESE,

IS,

WITH THE TRUEST RESPECT AND DEFERENCE,

INSCRIBED BY

HIS LORDSHIP'S MOST DUTIFUL SON,

AND OBLIGED HUMBLE SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.

TO THE

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St. MATTHEW, XXV. 40.

VERILY I SAY UNTO YOU, INASMUCH AS YE HAVE DONE IT UNTO ONE OF THE LEAST OF THESE MY BRETHREN, YE HAVE DONE IT UNTO ME.

DID we need motives to urge us to the practice of universal love and charity, we are here presented with the noblest that can animate the human heart. For whether we consider the majesty of the speaker, the singular condescension of the sentiment, or the sanction which our illustrious Redeemer thus adds to his former precepts, all and each of these reflections should impress us with the most lively gratitude, and call forth every generous principle within us.

Saint Matthew had been relating, in the preceding chapter, our Lord's laſt pathetic charge to his diſciples, in which he foretells his ſecond coming to judge the inhabitants of the earth; — and having repreſented the ſolemnity of the ſcene by two ſtriking parables, in the chapter from whence my text is taken, he thus proceeds:

"Then ſhall the king ſay unto them on his right hand, come "ye bleſſed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for "you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungred, "and ye gave me meat: I was thirſty, and ye gave me drink: I "was a ſtranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: "I was ſick, and ye viſited me: I was in priſon, and ye came unto "me. Then ſhall the righteous anſwer him, ſaying, Lord, when "ſaw we thee an hungred, and fed thee; or thirſty, and gave thee "drink? when ſaw we thee a ſtranger, and took thee in; or naked, "and clothed thee? or when ſaw we thee ſick, or in priſon, and "came unto thee? And the king ſhall anſwer, and ſay unto them, "— VERILY I SAY UNTO YOU, INASMUCH AS YE HAVE DONE "IT UNTO ONE OF THE LEAST OF THESE MY BRETHREN, "YE HAVE DONE IT UNTO ME."

God, the great ſource of all created excellence, is incapable of receiving an addition to his happineſs by any thing that we, his dependent creatures, can perform. His merciful deſign, in giving us exiſtence, ſubordinate to the "declaring his own glory, and ſhew-"in his handy-work," was to communicate to us a decree of happi-

neſs; and we then only approach to a reſemblance of him, when we are endeavouring to extend the ſame to all within our influence. The ſpirit of the text therefore can only be, that a principle of univerſal benevolence, prompting us to do all the good we can to our fellow-creatures, as it originally takes it's riſe from the love of God, ſo it ſhall receive his diſtinguiſhing approbation at the laſt great day. For reaſons founded in infinite wiſdom, God hath thought proper to diverſify the ſtates and conditions of mankind — to one he has given liberally of the bounties of his providence, and to another has ſeemingly denied every thing but a feeling heart. If we look into the great world, how frequently we ſee men of the faireſt character, and moſt accompliſhed merit, loſt to themſelves and to their country, by reaſon of their poverty; whilſt forward ignorance fills the foremoſt ranks of honor, and flaunts it in all the inſolence of unearned wealth. — And what ſentiments doth ſuch a view as this inſpire? Doth it not, in expreſſive ſilence, call upon the Rich and Fortunate to impart a portion of their goods to their needy brethren, and not to diſcover themſelves ungrateful to God by their inhumanity to men. Alas! he it is who giveth you to live at eaſe, "to eat the lambs "out the flock, and the calves out of the midſt of the ſtall, to "chaunt to the ſound of the viol, to drink wine in bowls, and to "anoint yourſelves with chief ointments;" and will ye not then be grieved for—nay, will ye not alleviate "the afflictions of Joſeph?" *

* Amos vi. 4, 5, 6.

Had

Had we no other inducement to incline us to relieve the Diſtreſſes of our fellow mortals, than that natural ſympathy which God hath implanted in every breaſt — yet who would refuſe to comply with it's tender ſolicitations? Who, that has experienced the heart-felt rapture of doing *one* benevolent deed, would aſk any other motives to beneficence, than the after-reflections of his own mind! And yet, as though theſe were inſufficient, we have *higher* motives propoſed to us in the goſpel. It is not enough to engage us to be "kindly-affectioned one to another," that we are all children of the ſame Parent-God, and travelling to the ſame eternal home; but we are called upon to conſider our ſtill nearer union with each other, in being redeemed by the ſame ſuffering Saviour — and who hath made it the diſtinguiſhing characteriſtic of his true diſciples, that they "love one another." "Greater love," according to human ideas, "hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend;" but our Divine Maſter even exceeded this love, by dying to redeem the very men who nailed him to the croſs. *He died to ſave ſinners.* And ſhall WE then think the meaneſt perſon upon earth unworthy our brotherly kindneſs, whom the Son of God thought worthy every drop of his blood! — —

Many people will tell you that, if they had but lived at the time when Jeſus Chriſt appeared in the fleſh, their houſes ſhould have been open for his reception, they would have ſeated themſelves daily at his feet, and hung upon every precept that dropped from his lips with the moſt devout attention. Is this then an excuſe for the

want

want of charity to our brethren? Do the perſons who make theſe ardent profeſſions of love to Chriſt, turn a deaf ear to the cries of misfortune, and let the widow and the orphan go away from them — unrelieved! If this be their character, moſt probable it is, they would have beheld, without a tear, their Saviour in his agonies, and far from ſympathiſing with his diſtreſs, would have formed a ſecret wiſh to "part his veſture among them." Chriſtianity can furniſh no greater ſanction to the obſervation of it's commandments, than thoſe it hath already given us. If the Jews would not hearken to Moſes and the prophets, neither would they have been perſuaded, though one roſe from the dead. And, in like manner, if Chriſtians will not practiſe the duties enjoined them in the goſpel, by Chriſt and his apoſtles, neither would THEY be perſuaded, though an angel ſhould ſpeak to them from heaven. It is mere deluſion to talk of what we would have done, had we lived in the days of Jeſus Chriſt. His religion is the ſame now, as it was then; and if we think we ſhould have "kept his words" with the moſt exact obſervance, had we heard him utter them, let us evidence the ſincerity of this our belief, by compaſſion to the neceſſitous; otherwiſe, we may be aſſured that, "inaſmuch as we do it not unto one of the leaſt of theſe "his brethren, we ſhould not have done it unto him. *The poor "we have always with us,*"— and there is, in the circle of every one's acquaintance, a number of indigent Perſons, to whom *a little* given, at a proper time, would greatly contribute to THEIR convenience, without diminiſhing our OWN. I ſpeak of thoſe poor heads of families, whoſe decent pride forbids them to ſolicit a ſordid pittance from door to door!

But the occaſion calls our thoughts to that particular ſpecies of chriſtian charity, which you are convened to countenance.

Standing forth to addreſs you on a ſubject of ſuch momentous conſequence, I feel more than I am able to expreſs. To protect the young and riſing progeny — to be the friend of thoſe, who have no other friends than what charity and their own circumſtances make them — to ſhield from the inroads of vice their tender and unguarded age — and to form the future huſband, parent, and citizen, as they are virtues enforced by the ſtrongeſt obligations, ſo they are thoſe too which moſt adorn and dignify our nature. It was a ſhining part in the character of Abraham, and for which he was ſingled out by the Almighty to "become the Father of a mighty people," that "he commanded his children, and his houſhold after him, to keep the "way of the Lord."* In the early ſtages of Reaſon, the mind is uncoloured by prejudice, and receives either good or bad impreſſions, according as they come recommended. This then is the ſeaſon for inſtruction; and though the faireſt preſages do not always enſure a ſuitable deportment through life, yet few among thoſe who have been "trained up in the way in which they ſhould go," have ſo far departed from the path of duty as to become deſperately depraved. Nay, even thoſe who have gone the furtheſt lengths in ſin, have candidly confeſſed at laſt, that they often experienced the ſweet returns of God's Spirit in their hearts, and were ſcarce able at times to reſiſt it's influence, and to ſtifle the clamors of Conſcience.

* Geneſis xviii. 18, 19.

When

When the Spartan commonwealth flouriſhed at it's height, the education of youth was deemed a matter of ſo much conſequence to the ſtate, as to be honored with the inſpection of the civil magiſtrate. But, for want of ſuch a wiſe regulation among ourſelves, PUBLIC CHARITY-SCHOOLS have been founded: and to the honor of this nation be it ſpoken, never was there any age or country, in which munificence of every kind was practiſed with more unſparing liberality than in the land we inhabit. Indeed, I ſincerely pity the man whoſe ſoul is eſtranged to the fine feelings of humanity, and whoſe benevolence never ſtrayed without the narrow circle of his own family and friends. To convince ſuch a perſon how exceedingly limited is his beneficence, give me leave to mention, that there are forty poor children under the guardianſhip of this SOCIETY, clothed and educated by free contribution, who, as that aſſiſtance is added or with-held, have this only chance put into their power of riſing above their poverty, or of being left to ſtruggle with it's various difficulties, without learning — without principle — and without experience! — — Viewed in another light, in reſpect to the public, and what meaſure can be more effectual than the ſupport of theſe SCHOOLS, towards ſuppreſſing the many vagrant beggars that infeſt your ſtreets, as well as the ſecuring your property from the lawleſs midnight invader!*

* It is a circumſtance much in favour of the Charity-Schools in this great City, if what I am credibly informed be true, that, of the many thouſands educated in them, not *one* Perſon has hitherto ſuffered an *ignominious Death*.

But

But the advantages arising from them both to church and ſtate, as they have been often inſiſted upon, ſo they are viſible to all; and it would be offering an affront to you my reſpected audience, to ſuppoſe you unconcerned ſpectators. Thus taught, and thus diſciplined for the great buſineſs of the world, ſome have been called to the pulpit, to the bar, and to the ſenate-houſe, who, without ſuch beginnings, muſt have ſtolen uſeleſs through life; or, at beſt, like the flowers of the deſart, would have "neglected bloomed, and neg-"lected died." Poverty hath been the lot of many a worthy man. And, when ſuch is the caſe, what can the diſconſolate father of a family do towards educating his children, when perhaps his whole earnings can ſcarcely ſupply the ſcanty pittance which nature herſelf requires. It is anguiſh ſufficient to ſuch a one that, from him his offspring has derived a ſinful and diſordered nature; and this affliction muſt undoubtedly be increaſed when he finds that, after all his ſolicitude, his children muſt be doomed to a life of the loweſt drugery and ſervitude, becauſe they are unqualified to move in an higher ſphere *. My heart bleeds at the reflection — and ſurely, if there is ought

* The objection againſt charity-ſchools in general, that they give poor children a ſmattering of learning, which ſerves only to ſet them above their condition, could never have ſuggeſted itſelf to a benevolent mind. For ſurely no man, poſſeſſed of even a moderate ſhare of humanity, will undertake to ſay that, we ought to keep in ignorance all thoſe whoſe misfortune and not fault it was, to have been born poor, leſt ſome few ingenuous youths, of the vaſt number, ſhould aſpire beyond the arduous employ of day-labourers. The author, however, would not be underſtood as recommending a mode of education in the leaſt degree incompatible with thoſe humbler ſtations

ought on earth for which the Affluent are to be envied, it muſt be for the tranſports they enjoy at beholding objects ſuch as THESE, made happy by their bounty. Here then is a wide field for ambition. In diffuſing bleſſings around him, the CHARITABLE MAN advances to a reſemblance of his God, even of that infinitely-glorious Being, whoſe tender mercies are over all his works. Tell the MISER this, and, if his ear be not as callous as the grave to the cries of humanity, he will fall down upon his knees, and bewail his miſtaken happineſs, if poſſible, in tears of blood. Behold then, whoever thou art, the Good Samaritan is paſſing by — obſerve his conduct — cheriſh the firſt riſings of compaſſion — and if thou ſhouldeſt meet, by the way-ſide, a man mangled with ſcars, and weltering in his gore, enquire not who, or what he is — but fly inſtantly to relieve him — take the unhappy ſtranger to thy boſom — pour balm into his wounds, and whatſoever thou wouldeſt that he ſhould do unto thee in the ſame circumſtances, — "Go, and do thou likewiſe."

But to return. It is an obſervation, that the man who beſtows a fortune upon another, does not make him ſo truly rich, as he who puts the means of acquiſition in his own power. Such gifts may

ſtations, which the majority of them muſt neceſſarily fill. He rather wiſhes, with the ſenſible writer of the "Eſtimate of the manners of the Times," to have them inured to early habits of induſtry; nevertheleſs, he would not ſtrain his argument ſo as to *make* it prove that, every thing like genius ſhould be diſcouraged, merely from an apprehenſion that the *unfortunate poſſeſſor* of it may one day raiſe himſelf thereby above his native poverty. This, without a metaphor, would be choking the ſeeds of ſcience where God and Nature meant they ſhould grow.

indeed ſerve the purpoſes of immediate exigency, and no doubt have often, in ſmaller portions, been happily applied, where chance or Providence may have directed any *real ſufferers* in our way. But the CHARITY we are now recommending has a nobler object in view, than barely a temporary aſſiſtance. It extends itſelf through a whole life; begins with them in early youth, conducts them up to manhood, and does not even forſake them till the ſprings of nature, decayed and broken by conſtant uſe, refuſe to exert their office. — This is a ſubject, my brethren, on which I could dwell with tranſport. — For, if the proſpects of the advancing SPRING, this Time of "Nature's reſurrection," the living verdure of the fields, the bloſſoms of our gardens, and the general beauty of the ſeaſon, call upon us for expreſſions of gratitude and praiſe; — how infinitely muſt thoſe raptures be heightened, at beholding a number of youth growing up in the "nurture, and admonition of the Lord," and, in this THEIR VERNAL SEASON, putting forth the fair bloſſoms of future uſefulneſs. The ſpring, alas! will ſoon be over and gone; the ſeaſon of youth will ſoon decay; but charity ſhall endure forever. Death may indeed intervene, and darkneſs overſpread the face of nature, yet charity never ſets; but, like the ſun, when he has left our hemiſphere, ſtill ſhines, with undiminiſhed radiance, in other worlds.

O Heaven-born Virtue! O Holy Charity! which thus exalts us to a fellowſhip with Angels, and glorified Intelligences! If ſuch the Bleſſings that flow from an obedience to thy dictates, who would

not be thy Diſciple! For thou art Peace, and he that dwelleth in thee dwelleth in Peace, and Peace in him.

I might mention it alſo, as an argument for your particular encouragmeent of theſe ſchools, at this time, that — to the deep concern of every thinking man — DEISM has of late years made very rapid advances in this kingdom. We are a nation highly favoured of the Almighty; but how much longer he may vouchſafe us his bleſſings, and we continue ungrateful for them — is not for man to determine. Yet thus much we may ſay, that every individual is bound to look to himſelf, and when judgement ſhall viſit us as a people, it will be no ſmall part of our condemnation, that light had come into our quarter, that we had lived in the purer ages of proteſtantiſm, and that we preferred the darkneſs of infidelity to the clear light of the goſpel, for this impious reaſon — "BECAUSE OUR "DEEDS WERE EVIL!" — To prevent then, as much as in us lies, the ſpreading influence of deiſm and immorality — to be patriots in the true ſenſe of the expreſſion, by aſſiſting to raiſe up thoſe who may be uſeful both in church and ſtate, let the children of our poor be early inſtructed in the principles of the goſpel, and the great duties which they owe to GOD, to their KING, and to their COUNTRY. Let us firſt, if we can, make them good chriſtians, and they will be good citizens, and good men, by conſequence.

But, although compaſſion and benevolence, patriotiſm and religion, unite in favour of this deſign, there is another motive that will

will weigh more with every ſerious chriſtian than all which have been enumerated; and that is, the ſolemn declaration of our Saviour in the text, that every act of tenderneſs towards the creatures of his care — every morſel given to the hungry — every kindneſs ſhewn the ſtranger — every attempt to clothe the naked — every effort to relieve the ſick — and every viſit made the priſoner, ſhall be conſidered as immediately done to his own perſon, and receive a ſuitable reward. "And the King ſhall anſwer, and ſay unto them — "verily I ſay unto you, inaſmuch as ye have done it unto one of "the leaſt of theſe my brethren, ye have done it unto me".

Having mentioned ſome of the benefits reſulting from theſe pious inſtitutions, indulge me a few minutes more with your candor and attention, whilſt, in the name of YONDER HUMBLE FAMILY, * I ſupplicate your alms. We deem it unneceſſary upon this occaſion to trouble you with many words. It is ſufficient to inform a BRITISH AUDIENCE, that they are the children of your poor Countrymen and Fellow-Citizens — *many* of them are orphans — and *all* of them real objects of charity. Young, helpleſs, and unconnected, they caſt their little cares before you, and ſeek a ſhelter in your bounty from the ſtorms of a tempeſtuous world. Methinks, I hear one of the dear Innocents thus pouring forth the fullneſs of it's Soul —

* The Charity-Children, who were preſent.

"And

"And hath God then indeed forſaken me! My parents who I "thought were intended as the guardians of my youth, hath he "taken away from me. My father is not — my mother is not — "and I alone am left, friendleſs and deſtitute, to the mercy of a "rude world. Muſt I then mingle with beggars in the public "ſtreets? Muſt *my* ſad ſtory be ſubject to like ſuſpicions with "*theirs*? Muſt theſe ears, that have been accuſtomed to more "tender ſounds, be pierced with oaths and blaſphemies? And muſt "I, like them, wander from door to door, and crave my daily ſuſte-"nance? Alas! why was I born! Had I fallen a breathleſs infant "from my mother's breaſt, and exchanged my cradle for a coffin, "I ſhould long ere now have had an home in heaven. But, wo "is me! the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have neſts; "yet I, young and unexperienced as I am, have not where to lay "my head."

Are there no parents here, none who, with fond anxiety, are raiſing little families about them, and counting every minute as it riſes till their children ſhall appear with dignity in life — are there none ſuch here? To you then, ye tender and indulgent parents, I come in full confidence of ſucceſs. What language ſo perſuaſive, what eloquence ſo moving, as the workings of parental ſympathy! If there be need of more, look yonder — there artleſs innocence — there modeſt plainneſs — there ſupplicating virtue — there living oratory, united plead — oh! let them not plead in vain. Think on their blameleſs poverty, think on the ſorrows they muſt other-

wiſe endure, think on their ſpotleſs age, think on your dear little ones at home; and, as you expect a bleſſing from heaven upon your own offspring, contribute to the ſupport of theſe amiable penſioners. Believe me, you will never repent of what you thus beſtow. That kind of diſpoſition which leads you to bear a part in all the miſery you ſee about you, will not only be it's own reward in this world, but will enſure you a heaven in reverſion, into which "pain and "death cannot enter, and where the days of mourning ſhall be "ended." *Whether there be prophecies, they ſhall fail; whether there be tongues, they ſhall ceaſe; whether there be knowledge, in ſhall vaniſh away; but charity ſhall endur forever.* "And it is the laſt "thing I ſhould ever believe, that the man who has cheriſhed "each liberal movement of the ſoul, with an heart ever-willing to "promote, and with hands ever-active to diſtribute to the good of "his fellow-men, ſhould, after all, be baniſhed his Creator's preſence, "and doomed to that infernal place, where benevolence never ſheds "her kindly beams, but where anguiſh, malice, and darkneſs reign "for evermore †."

"There is a ſore evil," ſays Solomon, "which I have ſeen "under the ſun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to "their hurt."‡ Thoſe amongſt you therefore whom God hath bleſſed with affluence, will conſider yourſelves under particular obligations to miniſter of your abundance. You are indeed the ſtewards of the

† Seed's Sermons. ‡ Eccleſiaſtes v. 13.

Almighty;

Almighty; and happy, yea, thrice happy will you be, if, when called to "give an account of your ſtewardſhip," it ſhall appear that you had faithfully employed the riches entruſted to your care, in the ſervice of your Lord — in relieving the diſtreſſes of his creatures — in cheriſhing neglected worth — and removing, as far as in your power, want and wretchedneſs out of the world.

Nor let the poorer claſs of mankind be diſcouraged, becauſe they have but *little* to beſtow. Theſe often carry beneath their homely garb, the moſt humane and worthy hearts; and as they give from a right principle, ſo the mites which they throw into the treaſury of the Lord, ſhall be reſtored them ſeven-fold into their boſom.

In a word then, "if there be any conſolation in Chriſt, if any comfort of love, if any fellowſhip of the Spirit,"* if any pity and compaſſion, let them *now* be made manifeſt. Extend your bounty *now* to theſe INFANT-PEOPLE, if ever you expect mercy from others in the day of your calamity, and from your Saviour in the day of judgment. We intreat you on God's behalf, we call upon you in the name of Chriſt, by all his holy precepts and example, by his agonies in the garden, by the bloody ſcenes of Calvary, by his glorious reſurrection and aſcenſion, and by your hopes of everlaſting glory, that you do not diſappoint us in this "labour of love."— Give joyfully then, with liberal hands and hearts, always remembering that comfortable ſcripture — HE THAT GIVETH TO THE POOR, LENDETH TO THE LORD.

* Phil. ii. 1.

And

And may God, the great advocate of the poor and needy, bless this humble endeavour for their sakes. May he pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace, and of all virtues; and may those worthy, generous souls, who now contribute to this charitable design, be blessed in this world, and rewarded with a crown of glory, when time shall be no more!

THE END.